LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR TRAITS AND ETHICS

Dr. JAMES BAIRD

Southwest University, 1414 Geronimo, EL Paso, TX 79912

ABSTRACT

Leadership behavior and ethics have become a concern in most business industries. Historically there have been some very poor behavior and ethics exhibited by corporate leaders in the world. This can be detrimental to the organization and to the business as a whole. In this narrative, the discussion will be what good leadership behavior is and what kind of ethics good leaders follow on a consistent basis.

KEYWORDS: Leadership, Traits & Ethics

Original Article

INTRODUCTION

Behavior Traits

Most companies, irrespective of the business that they are in or how large the organization has become, need excellent leaders to be successful. Great leaders are an integral part of effective business processes and actions. A majority of time, good leadership traits do not come inherently and have to be learned over time. In the ever-changing environment of business there are several theories about what good leadership is, what are the traits of a good leader, and how to be the effective on a daily basis. There are many leadership styles that can be adopted, and the impact varies based on the industry the company is in. The theories explain how the different styles work within an organization and how they bring success both operationally and strategically (Western Governors University, 2020).

LEADERSHIP THEORIES

These types of theories try to explain why certain individuals become leaders. It focuses on the behaviors that leaders can adopt to increase their leadership skills. Some of the best traits described leaders can have are strong ethics and high moral standards, self-organizational skills; they are fast-paced learners, nurture growth in employees, and foster a connection and sense of belonging. Research indicates that traits such as these are considered extremely important to leaders around the world. These theories try to explain how leaders harness and develop these traits over time. Leadership theories over the last couple of years have been more formalized making the theories easier to understand, communicate, and analyze in action. The main goal of leadership is to produce good leaders, not followers and to foster an environment where a leader can alter the perspective or psychology of an employee and shift the view of staff to want to become a leader. This infers those leaders should be elevating and inspiring on a consistent basis. Leaders should propel staff to new heights, helping workers to grow into what an individual can become. Transformational leadership is an extremely important psychological mindset for leaders to understand which enables them to influence and impact others. Several leadership theories address how to create stronger and more essential leadership styles, helping followers to become good leaders. Also, this aids in

creating an ethical leader facing true north. In this atmosphere leaders facilitate a coaching environment which empowers and engages members of the workforce (Western Governors University, 2020).

MAJOR THEORIES

The behavioral theory is one that focuses on how leaders behave in everyday interactions with everyone around them. It is said that these particular traits can be copied by leaders and those aspiring to be leaders. Referred to by many experts as style theory, it states that leaders are not necessarily born successful but are created based on learned skills and behavior. These types of theories focus highly on the actions and observable traits of the person. The supposition here is that the best predictor of leadership success is watching how the leader acts. Actions, rather than qualities or business experience, are the focal points of behavioral learning theory. Different behavior patterns are observed, analyzed, and then broken down into categories of "styles of leadership." Different styles mean different behavior is apparent in the actions of the leader. Some of the styles are task-oriented leaders, people-oriented leaders, country club leaders, status-quo leaders, and dictatorial leaders. In the final analysis the actions and actual behavior of the individual defines the success of the person in regard to leadership workforce (Western Governors University, 2020).

The behavioral theory states primarily that leaders can learn and decide what behavior they need to adapt to become the kind of leader they want to be. It allows leaders flexibility and adaptability to be more in the direction that dictates their circumstances. Another benefit is that it suggests anyone is capable of becoming a leader. However, there are some disadvantages of this theory; it allows flexibility, but it does not specify how to behave in certain circumstances to be successful. Fundamentally stated in this theory and the many leadership styles that stem from it, there is not a right one for all circumstances workforce (Western Governors University, 2020).

A good example of this is doing a compare and contrast of the task-oriented leader vs. a people-oriented leader. If there are issues with the team, the task-oriented leader will look at and observe whether the workflow needs to be adjusted. A people-oriented leader will approach employees and ask what the problem is. Which one is better? It depends on the situation and maybe even the industry. Many leadership-experts state that good leaders can float in between different situations and adopt a particular style to fit the circumstances. Whatever style one adopts behavioral theory can assist leaders on focusing on their actions and in turn making prudent decisions for the benefit of the organization and all stakeholders (Western Governors University, 2020).

Contingency theory, sometimes referred to as situational theory, tends to focus on the context of the leader. This theory looks at the situational effects of the success or failure of the leader in terms of how a certain problem is handled. Therefore, the effectiveness of the leader is evaluated based on the particular situational context. This concept suggests that personality is a small factor in the overall success of the leader and that the most significant factor is context and the situation facing the manager. The theory purports that this type of leader can adjust the style to fit the situation at hand. Management must find the right kind of leader for the given situation. This type of leadership style does have its advantages; for instance, with this style leaders are able to be effective no matter the situation. Theories such as these do have criticism with many saying that there isn't enough detail that goes into the context of every situation. Contingency theory may focus too much on the situation and not the psychology and culture of the organization. There are environmental forces both internal and external that influence a leader and the present situation within the firm. The type of organization, the number of individuals in the team, the gender or culture of the team, the intrinsic leadership style of an individual are internal factors. External factors may comprise of customer feelings about the product, service, or the

company itself, the market, the economy, or even the geographic area or country. Many situations will play a factor when it comes to contingency theory (Western Governors University, 2020).

Great Man theory, occasionally referred to as trait theory, hypothesizes that good leaders are born not made. The supposition here is that great leaders have innate traits, behaviors, and skills that enable them to do certain tasks that cannot be learned or taught. Trait theory states that leaders acquire and deserve leadership positions because of these unique traits. There is a wide amount of criticism for trait theory, specifically on the statement that leaders are born with a vast number of skills to become an exemplary leader. Furthermore, the conjecture here is that there isn't work or much effort required to become a top-notch leader. What this suggests is that sociological or psychological leaders are destined and that others are not able to emerge from the penumbra— they either have the traits or they do not. Wide criticism is also given that most of these good leadership traits are associated as masculine in nature and do not really match the real psychology of excellent leaders. Many researchers cite Abraham Lincoln, Alexander the Great, Queen Elizabeth I and quite a few others as examples of the great man theory. These famous leaders utilized their skills and attributes to lead nations to new heights. A high level of ambition and persistence seem to bring this to life. If one looks at the biographies of these individuals, they will see that they also learned along the way. So, it may seem they got the position based on inherent gifts or skills but many experts in the leadership field state it is much more than innate genetic traits (Western Governors University, 2020).

MANAGEMENT THEORY

The management theory is referred to many times as transactional leadership and focuses on day-to-day supervision, organization, and team performance. The basis of this kind of leadership style is a system of rewards and punishments. When staff achieve objectives, a reward is given to the employee. When team members fail to achieve goals, they are punished. This is a very old theory of leadership that dates back to the 1800s. Rewards and punishment are based on the theory that employees only achieve work objectives for a reward. It assumes that the human psychology does not allow human beings to complete tasks out of any other motivation but reward. This type of style can be effective in the short term but in the long term the organization may run into difficulties. One reason is that consequences and punishments can decrease motivation and morale and have a negative effect on engagement and the feeling of empowerment. At that point workers may disengage and productivity goes down markedly. This in and above itself has a lasting negative effect on the company and many leadership experts see this style as lazy leadership. Good leaders understand that reward is not the only motivation that gets employees engaged. An example of this management style is a leader who offers a cash incentive if staff meets its goals. Or they force employees to do extra paperwork or work longer hours if they do not meet objectives. Transactional totally disallows the psychological aspects of leading workers and does not accomplish goals in the long run. Also, many times there is high turnover at organizations that employ this kind of style (Western Governors University, 2020).

ETHICS AND LEADERSHIP

Autonomous vehicles will someday be on the road more and more. When a crash happens should the car save a single driver or five pedestrians crossing at a cross walk? Should the car be programmed to save older individuals or younger ones? Should a pregnant woman count as two human beings? Leaders in the auto industry are going to have to deal with these types of ethical quandaries. There are ethical and legal considerations that will need to be analyzed (Bazerman, 2020).

Leaders responding to ethical questions should be guided by what is best for the organization's employees, as well as society as a whole. Going beyond a basic group of ethical rules such as "don't lie" and "don't cheat" which is rooted in the teachings of Bentham, Mill, and Singer provides the clarity to make a wide array of leadership decisions. For centuries theorists have debated over what makes up moral and ethical actions, forming hypotheses about what individuals should do. Recently social scientists have presented research-based articles that cover what society should do when confronted with ethical dilemmas. These researchers have reported that environment, psychology, and organizational culture can lead employees to engage in unethical behavior even if it goes against deeply planted personal values. If staff behave unethically out of self-interest, many times employees are unaware that the behavior is wrong. This is known as motivated blindness. Workers may claim that the contributions to the goals outweigh the violation of values. Many times, executives in the business overlook serious wrongdoings if it gets the organization to fulfill the mission and vision (Bazerman, 2020)

Good leaders improve ethical decision-making by blended philosophical theories with business school pragmatism. Utilitarianism, which was initially proffered by Bentham, states that ethical behavior is one that that maximizes utility to society or amplifies value. The goal here is to increase the well-being of the company without unethical actions which can endanger the overall health of the business. There is no self-interest here and it is a process of combining profit with good moral critical thinking. Questions must be asked like "what is best for the company, for employees, and for society?"Blending these concepts into decision making will create profits without immoral actions that affect all three aspects of the question. The objective here is to appreciate creating as much value as possible within the limits of a moral perspective. The philosophy behind Utilitarianism aligns with many other ethical theories and provides a useful gauge for examining leadership ethics (Bazerman, 2020).

OVERCOMING BARRIERS

Consider these two questions; how much would you pay to save five children? How much would you pay to save 200,000 children? This is a perplexing ethical quandary and research shows that individuals who are asked the first question donate close to the same amount as do individuals who are asked the second question. If the organizational goal is to create as much value as possible, the difference in the number of children should affect how much you donate. What this illustrates is the limitations of ethical logic. This suggests that improving ethical decisions involves deliberately making ration decisions that maximize value without violating morals. Bounded rationality is defined as managers wanting to be rational but influenced by biases and other limiting factors that get in the way of ethical decision-making. Some academics state that most individuals won't exhibit rational behavior with company goals. Scholars argue that staff should aspire to be ethical and that leaders should lead employees in the direction that is true north (Bazerman, 2020).

Bounded ethicality are those systematic cognitive barriers that keep workers from being ethical. The challenge is adjusting maximizing personal goals and work goals and behaving as ethically as possible and creating a North Star that guides morals. Aiming in this direction can move staff towards increasing maximum sustainable goodness. How do we do this? First, make decisions by comparing options rather than assessing each individually. Intuition and emotions tend to force staff to think about options one at a time. It is better to compare multiple options then decision making is more carefully considered and is less biased and stereotypical. The second strategy involves what John Rawls calls "The Veil of Ignorance". This strategy states that that we structure, and judge based on status rich or poor, man or women, black or white and that is the veil of ignorance. If we tear away that ignorance then leaders, and employees as well, make fairer and more ethical decisions. When organizations do this, the company will create more value and better profits. Furthermore,

employees become more motivated and engaged in the day-to-day tasks that need to be accomplished (Bazerman, 2020).

Leaders that Overlook Wrongdoing

Trying to create more value is one of the principal objectives of any leader. But leaders must confront cognitive limitations. Kahneman stated in the book *Thinking Fast and Slow,* leaders have two very different modes of decision-making. The first system is the intuitive system, which is fast, and one could say automatic; it is effortless and emotionally focused. Kahneman believed that leaders make most decisions using the first system. The second system is referred to as deliberative thinking. This system is slower, more conscious, requires increased effort, and is normally based on logic. With this system, leaders tend make decisions closer to rational thought. Philosopher Joshua Greene has theorized a parallel two-system view of value-based decision making which includes some of Kahneman's thinking. An intuitive system and a more deliberative one. The deliberative system leads to ethical conduct (Bazerman, 2020).

The following are two examples of strategies for developing this way of thinking. First, leaders need to make decisions by comparing options rather than assessing each alternative one at a time. The reason for this is that intuition and emotions tend to control decisions when leaders think about options one at a time. If managers compare multiple options decisions are more carefully contemplated, less preconceived, and create more value for the organization. When managers use the first system, there is less of an emotional push and more reasoning on what should be done for the most good. The second system involves the veil of ignorance which was previously covered. Here leaders obscure the social identity of anything that is interpreted or analyzed (Bazerman, 2020).

Trade-Offs

In any endeavor there will always be trade-offs. Leaders must view trade-offs facing true north and always have an ethical perspective. The decision analysis content area argues that employees need to know how much one choice will be traded for how much of the other to make a prudent decision. With this mind set, staff create value for the organization. The simplest trade-offs to break down involve personal decisions. More times than not negotiation focuses on what is the best for the negotiator. With this being said decisions made by the company leaders should create value for all stakeholders. Leadership strategists have offered guidance on ways to increase sources of value. These include building trust, asking questions, sharing data, negotiating several issues at once, making multiple offers at the same time, and providing value-creating information. The idea here is to create value for all parties involved. Even if one of the parties creates more value than the organization, more than likely value creation will happen within your organization in the long run. Increasing impact as a leader depends on ethical behavior; managers are not only responsible for self but for the decisions of staff. At this point, leaders influence others to be better in everyday activities such as tasks, procedures, processes, and interactions with customers. Directors of the organization do influence employees with the norms they set and the decision-making atmosphere at the company. This can guide the company to higher profits and becoming an integral part of the community. This is key to return business and clients recommending the business to others.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING AN ETHICAL LEADER

Everyone in his own environment must strive to practice true humanity toward others. The future of the world depends on it. Great values are lost at every moment because we miss opportunities, but the values that are turned into will and action constitute a richness that must be undervalued. Our humanity is by no means as materialistic as people claim so complacently (Schweitzer, 1952 pg. 1).

These strong and true words were spoken by Albert Schweitzer in his Nobel speech in 1952. It is as true today as it was in 1952. Being an ethical leader must be a conscious decision. To be conscious means to be mindful. This in turn means to be open to perceiving the world around us and in us and to understand the circumstances and then decide how to react to situations in ways that consider values and goals together. Here leaders pursue the goals in coextension with values and morality. When managers lose consciousness most times bad instincts and habits take over and do not serve the organization, the employees, or the customers in a prudent way. Being an ethical leader increased credibility and reputation. This will foster an environment where staff will follow and be successful fulfilling the goals and objectives of the company. This is key in the competitive business world of today. Acting unethically can cause the leader to damage the company brand and personal brand as well. Behaving unethically can deteriorate one's self-esteem and lead to suboptimal business outcomes and missed opportunities to express the full potential of the company and individual (Villirilli, 2021).

Ethical Traits

There are nine ethical traits that great leaders follow. Number one is that they know their internal compass and values. These leaders always face north and make the values expected visible and clear to others. Number two is that they have consistent ethical behavior. This happens 24/7 and the signals are clear. Number three, they do not tolerate deviations from the ethical code. Ethical leaders do not tolerate unethical behavior. In an ethical culture leaders build consistency, credibility, and avoid any doubts about accepted behaviors. Number four is they raise their concerns even if unpopular. Concerns are raised even if it slows processes down and generates more work. Number five, they admit mistakes and shear recovery plans. Issues are never hidden managers admit the mistake and find ways to solve the problem and move forward. Number six, they are willing to assume full responsibility. They readily assume all responsibility and realize that this is a coaching opportunity. Lack of responsibility leads to ineffective behaviors and serious problems for the company. Number seven, they always show up and speak for their teams. Leaders are there through good times and bad times, coach teams, and defend their team if needed. Number eight, they act with fairness. Manager behaviors support merit, reward, and fair treatment of every individual under all circumstances. Number nine, they walk the talk. These leaders practice what they preach and their values and deeds are visible to everyone in the organization. This aligns with the choice of consciousness and daily focus on good ethics (Villirilli, 2021).

Having Strong Values is a Key to Great Leadership

Being a manager there is a clear distinction between being a boss and being a leader. Bosses give orders; a leader guides and coaches; a boss manages; a leader motivates, empowers, and inspires. Leaders are well aware of how they make their employees feel and the relationship they have with staff. Ethical leaders know that respect for ethical beliefs, values, dignity, and the rights of others is important in employee engagement and empowerment. This leads the organization to success and attainment of goals. Appropriate conduct is exhibited inside and outside of the business at all times (Kuligowski, 2021).

Leadership of this type brings many benefits to the company. A positive culture is instilled and cultivated. Employees' moral improves and engagement is increased significantly. Staff have a feeling of empowerment, respect, and appreciation. The brand of the organization improves. This will make the entity more competitive and increase profits. Scandal prevention is a critical element of this type of management. The organization does not create bad public relations or a toxic leadership style that may hurt the brand. This will cause customers not to turn to competitors. Loyalty is cultivated not only with employees but with the customers as well. Workplace stress goes down significantly and

productivity increases (Kuligowski, 2021).

How to Become an Ethical Leader

There are certain actions that leader can do to foster an environment of ethics, values, and morals. First, define and align ethical values. Treat others as the leader wants to be treated, say thank you, help those who are struggling and realize that this is a coaching opportunity. Leaders need to make sure to demonstrate how adhering to ethical values will benefit the mission and vision of the organization. Create a shared vision of values. Second, hire individuals with similar values. Common ground needs to be established with employees. Hire staff that are aligned with the ethics instead of just hiring for experience. Doing this is critical to the well-being of the company. With no mutual respect and appreciation is it very hard to develop a dynamic team which is a main requirement to be competitive and profitable. Understand that it is very difficult to respect someone who does not share common values with the leader. Third, promote open communication. With every decision management must be transparent and advocate feedback from teams. Listening to feedback from employees assists in leaders becoming better leaders and moves the business to greater heights. Fourth, beware of bias. Most individuals have beliefs, internal or otherwise and can be outdated or erroneous. In successful businesses there is no room for bias. Leaders must make sure all understand this. Fifth, lead by example. Know that the individuals that work there are watching leaders and exhibiting copy-cat behavior. Management has to foster an atmosphere that instils respect and lets staff see that the leaders truly believe in these values. Sixth, find role models. Do research and identify what good ethical leaders do on a daily basis and implement it into the leadership style of the entity. Seven, Care for the inner self. Develop time for self-care and realize this is critical to support the overall style of leadership for the organization. Having a calm and capable mindset is key to strong leadership (Kuligowski, 2021).

In conclusion, as a leader paying attention to behavior traits and ethics is so very important to your career and that of the company. These are characteristics that need to be thought of and focused upon by management every day. Some topics to remember are actions speak louder than words. Don't make false promises; if you make one keep it. Always be unselfish and put your staff first. Treat everyone with respect and appreciation. Provide training on a consistent basis and especially to new employees. Always emphasize ethical behavior and train on it. Ethics promotes a positive workplace culture, productivity, and profitability. Practice good communication. Be transparent and never lie or mislead stakeholders. Keep associates and the workers in the loop. Finally create an environment that is focused on adjusting, adapting, innovating, and moving forward (Kuligowski, 2021).

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AUTHOR PROFILE

Dr. James Baird earned a Bachelor's in Business Management in 1999 cum laude and his Master of Business Administration with a specialization in Healthcare Management in 2001, both from the University of Phoenix. In 2006, he completed his Ph.D. in Leadership and Organizational Management at Capella University with distinction. He is a Certified Allied Health Instructor and a Fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives. With more than twenty years of clinical, administrative, management, and leadership experience in the health care field, as well as twenty-one years of leadership & teaching experience at the College level, Dr. Baird is considered by many a leadership expert.